

# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## RAPID CITY GUARD UNIT DEPLOYS TO MIDDLE EAST

A deployment ceremony was held for 26 soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, June 8. Family, friends and community supporters gathered at Rapid City's Rushmore Plaza Civic Center to support their loved ones as the unit prepares to deploy to the Middle East for nine months in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

The Rapid City-based 935th will provide aviation maintenance and repair support for U.S. Army rotary aircraft and avionics systems.

This will be the second mobilization for the 935th, which deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2012-2013.

"About half of our unit has never deployed," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Seth Mendel, commander for the 935th. "We have eight Soldiers that specifically came to this unit to deploy. I've been very impressed with the quality of individuals we have."

Speakers for the ceremony included U.S. Congresswoman Kristi Noem, Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general.

With the overwhelming support of their families and the community they leave behind, the soldiers of the 935th are prepared and ready to accomplish the mission.

The unit will report to Fort Hood, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deploying overseas.

"Our National Guard lineage traces back to 1862," said Maj. Gen. Reisch. "One hundred years ago today, the whole SDNG was deployed in World War I. Just about 20 years after the end of that war, they were ready to start World War II, another total mobilization of the SDNG. This mobilization here today is just as historic, just as important, just as much of our history and legacy."

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# VA ADDS THIRD CRISIS LINE CALL CENTER

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has opened its third Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) call center in Topeka, Kansas on the campus of the Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center.

"Our focus is, as it always has been, to provide 24/7 world-class suicide prevention and crisis intervention services," said VA Acting Secretary Peter O'Rourke of VA's Veterans Health Administration. "The VA is improving its service with this newest call center for veterans, service members and their families."

The VA has always prioritized the need to provide immediate care to veterans in crisis, and the VCL is an essential part of this life-saving mission.

The Topeka-based center was opened to support increased demand. The VA has two other call centers located in Canandaigua, New York, and Atlanta, Georgia.

Since the VA launched the VCL in 2007, the crisis line responders have:

- Answered over 3.5 million calls
- Initiated the dispatch of emergency services to callers in imminent crisis nearly 93,000 times
- Engaged over 397,000 requests for chat services
- Answered nearly 92,000 requests for text services
- Forwarded more than 582,000 referrals to local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs) on behalf of veterans to ensure continuity of care with veterans local VA providers.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide – and those who know a veteran in crisis – can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat), or text to 838255.



# VA AND PSYCHARMOR INSTITUTE OFFER ONLINE SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING

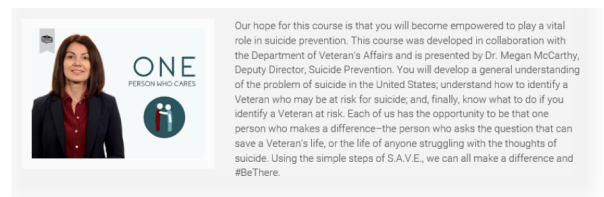
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in collaboration with [PsychArmor Institute](#), a national nonprofit that provides online education and support to Americans who work with, live with or care for military service members, veterans and their families, recently launched an online suicide-prevention training video, titled “SAVE,” which is designed to equip anyone who interacts with veterans to demonstrate care, support and compassion when talking with a veteran who could be at risk for suicide.



SAVE which stands for Signs, Ask, Validate, Encourage and Expedite, offers simple steps anyone — whether a treatment provider, clinician, friend or family member — can take when talking with Veterans at risk for suicide.

“The VA is leading efforts to prevent suicide among veterans, but the VA alone cannot end veteran suicide,” said VA Acting Secretary Peter O’Rourke. “We need strategic partners, care providers and communities to join us in this effort. Resources such as SAVE are crucial in helping all Americans support veterans in their community.”

S.A.V.E.



The VA suicide prevention coordinators have led the SAVE course at VA facilities and community centers across the nation. VA officials said extending and promoting this important training outside the VA is critical in helping everyone play a role in suicide prevention.

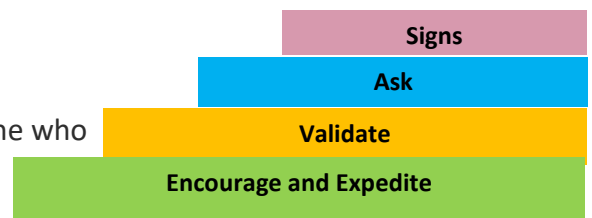
The free training video can be viewed at <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>. The 25-minute online training course covers three main topics:

- Suicide as a public health issue in the U.S.
- Signs that a veteran may be at risk for suicide
- Actions people can take if they identify a veteran at risk.

Veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide — and anyone who knows a veteran in crisis — should call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat) or text to 838255.

Reporters covering the topic of suicide are encouraged to visit <http://www.reportingonsuicide.org/> for important guidance.



# SDDVA PARTAKES IN YELLOW RIBBON

SDDVA Field Officer Kevin Swanson and Education Representative Ryan Fowler attended the Yellow Ribbon event last weekend in Pierre. The DOD Yellow Ribbon was a post mobilization event for the 200th Engineer Company.

Hughes/Stanley/Sully County VSO Charles Quinn assisted at SDDVA's booth.

Fowler and Swanson addressed the assembly and updated the troops on state and federal benefits available to them and their family.



# 30 SD ARMY NATIONAL GUARD UNITS RECEIVE SUPERIORS

Thirty out of 42 South Dakota Army National Guard units received the National Guard Bureau's Superior Unit Award in recognition of outstanding achievement during training year 2017.

The Superior Unit Award is presented to units who meet highly-enforced military standards in the areas of personnel, training and readiness.

"The South Dakota Army National Guard makes up only 9/10ths of one percent of this nation's National Guard, but we earned 97 percent of the Superior Unit Awards for training year 2017," said Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard. "This is yet another example of how the South Dakota National Guard stands head and shoulders above our contemporaries."

In order to earn the SUA, units must achieve 95 percent in unit strength, monthly drill attendance, annual training attendance and weapons qualification. In addition to meeting these readiness goals, units must also achieve 90 percent in physical fitness tests and duty-qualified soldiers. Unit admin and maintenance inspections also factor into award requirements.

The top award for the state went to Company C, 1-189th Aviation Regiment of Rapid City, which received the Eisenhower Trophy for the most exceptional SDARNG unit. The Eisenhower Trophy is named in honor of former General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower and awarded by the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to the ARNG unit in each state rated the most outstanding during the training year.

More than half of the SUA units are continuing consecutive years of training excellence - with six units receiving the award for the second time in a row, four units for a third straight year, four units for four consecutive years, four more for five consecutive years, and the 211th Engineer Company has earned the SUA six years in a row. (Units receiving superiors can be found listed on the next page.)

# UNITS RECEIVING SUPERIORS

This year's recipients of the Superior Unit Award include:

- \* Battery A, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion \*\*\*\*\* - Aberdeen
- \* Company A, 139th Brigade Support Battalion - Brookings
- \* Headquarters Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion \*\*\*\*\* - Huron
- \* Forward Support Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion \*\*\*\*\* - Huron and Parkston
- \* 211th Engineer Company \*\*\*\*\* - Madison and De Smet
- \* 740th Transportation Company \*\*\* - Milbank and Aberdeen
- \* 147th Army Band \*\* - Mitchell
- \* Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion \*\* - Mitchell
- \* 200th Engineer Company \*\*\*\*\* - Pierre, Chamberlain and Mobridge
- \* Detachment 1, Company B, 1-112th Aviation Battalion \*\* - Rapid City
- \* Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment \*\* - Rapid City
- \* Headquarters Detachment, 109th Regional Support Group - Rapid City
- \* Joint Force Headquarters - Rapid City
- \* 82nd Civil Support Team \*\*\*\*\* - Rapid City
- \* 216th Firefighter Headquarters - Rapid City
- \* SDARNG Recruiting and Retention Command - Rapid City
- \* SDARNG Training Center \*\*\*\*\* - Rapid City
- \* SDARNG Medical Command \*\*\*\*\* - Rapid City
- \* 451st Engineer Detachment (Firefighters) \*\* - Rapid City
- \* 155th Engineer Company \*\*\*\*\* - Rapid City and Wagner
- \* 235th Military Police Company \*\* - Rapid City and Sioux Falls
- \* 2nd Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute - Sioux Falls
- \* 1742nd Transportation Company - Sioux Falls and Flandreau
- \* 1st Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute - Sturgis
- \* 881st Troop Command - Sturgis
- \* 842nd Engineer Company \*\*\* - Spearfish, Belle Fourche and Sturgis
- \* 730th Area Support Medical Company - Vermillion
- \* Forward Support Company, 147th Field Artillery Battalion - Watertown
- \* Headquarters Battery, 147th Field Artillery Battalion \*\*\* - Watertown
- \* Battery B, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion \*\*\* - Yankton

\*\* Denotes second straight year for receiving the award.

\*\*\* Denotes third straight year for receiving the award.

\*\*\*\* Denotes fourth straight year for receiving the award.

\*\*\*\*\* Denotes fifth straight year for receiving the award.

\*\*\*\*\* Denotes sixth straight year for receiving the award.



# WALZ NAMED NEW SD AIR GUARD ASST. ADJ. GENERAL

Brig. Gen. Russ Walz assumed duties as the assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Air National Guard, during a transfer of authority ceremony at Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls, June 3.

Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, presided over the ceremony where Walz assumed authority as the assistant adjutant from Brig. Gen. Joel DeGroot, who served in the position since March 2017. DeGroot will now be the chief of staff, Headquarters, SDANG.

Walz is now responsible to the adjutant general for strategic planning, strength management, Airmen readiness and mobilization support of the state's nearly 1,100 Air National Guard Airmen.

After the transfer of authority, Walz addressed members of the 114th Fighter Wing.

"It's truly an honor to be representing this unit in the new capacity as the assistant adjutant general and it's a big honor to represent the state of South Dakota," Walz said. "It's an honor and blessing to represent the 1,093 men and women who are unbelievable professionals."

During the ceremony, Reisch commented on DeGroot's time as assistant adjutant. "He has done a fantastic job over the last year," said Reisch, "He stepped into leadership right away." Reisch also commented on how DeGroot stepped up as a regional leader for the JDEC (Joint Diversity Executive Committee) nationally, which he stated was an amazing achievement for a new general.

Reisch said that the 10 years Walz served as the 114th commander, followed by two years at state headquarters, make him a perfect fit for this job.

Prior to taking on this new position, Walz served as director of joint staff, Joint Force Headquarters, SDNG, and SDANG chief of staff. He primarily served as the principal advisor to the adjutant general on all joint issues and policies relating to defense support to civil authorities and homeland defense programs.

Walz enlisted in the SDANG in 1980. He later commissioned at the Academy of Military Science in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1989, earning distinguished graduate honors. He completed undergraduate pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi. Walz assumed the position of director of joint staff in May 2016, having held previous command positions at the flight, squadron, group and wing levels. He is a command pilot with over 3,700 total fighter hours, including 70 combat hours enforcing no-fly zones over southern and northern Iraq.



# SAILOR ACCOUNTED FOR FROM WORLD WAR II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, accounted for from World War II, are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Navy Reserve Radioman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Julius H.O. Pieper, 19, of Esmond, South Dakota, accounted for on Nov. 15, 2017, will be buried June 19, 2018, at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France. On June 19, 1944, Pieper was a member of Landing Ship Tank Number 523 (LST-523), off the coast of Normandy, France. The ship exploded and sank after striking an underwater mine, killing Pieper. In the years following the incident, his remains were not recovered or identified. Pieper's twin brother, Radioman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Ludwig J. Pieper, was also killed in the attack, but his remains were recovered after the incident and buried at the Normandy American Cemetery in France. Julius will be buried next to his brother.

Recently discovered records show that in September 1961, French salvage divers dismantled the LST-523 and turned over potential remains discovered to U.S. authorities. The remains, designated as Unknown X-9352, were found in the Radio Room of LST-523.

The remains could not be identified and were interred in Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium as an Unknown.

After a thorough historical and scientific analysis, it was determined that X-9352 could likely be identified. After receiving approval, on April 11, 2017, Unknown X-9352 was disinterred from Ardennes American Cemetery and sent to DPAA.

To identify Pieper's remains, DPAA used laboratory analysis, including dental, anthropological and chest radiograph comparison analysis, as well as circumstantial and material evidence.

DPAA is grateful to the French salvage divers and the American Battle Monuments Commission for their partnership in this recovery.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died during the war. Currently there are 72,917 service members (approximately 26,000 assessed as possibly-recoverable) still unaccounted for from World War II. Pieper's name is recorded on the Walls of the Missing at the Normandy American Cemetery in France, an American Battle Monuments Commission site. Although interred as an "Unknown" in Ardennes American Cemetery, Pieper's grave was meticulously cared for over the past 70 years by the American Battle Monuments Commission. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for Americans who went missing while serving our country, visit the DPAA website at [www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil), or call (703) 699-1420/1169.



# VA EXTENDS RECORD OF TRANSPARENCY FOR NURSING HOME RATINGS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) extended its unprecedented 18-month record of transparency disclosures by making public for the first time its annual nursing home ratings. View the ratings [here](#).

The data show that, overall, the VA's nursing home system – composed of more than 130 community living centers – compares closely with private sector nursing homes, even though the department on average cares for sicker patients in its nursing homes than do private facilities.

In fact, the overall star rating for VA's nursing homes compared to the 15,487 private sector nursing homes rated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) shows that VA has a significantly lower percentage (34.1 percent lower) of one-star, or lowest rated, facilities than the rest of the nation. Of note, 60 of VA's nursing homes improved their quality score from last year to this year (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter FY17 to 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter FY18). Only one facility had a meaningful decline in that metric, and that facility was already rated with four stars.

The VA has become the first hospital system in the nation to post its: [Hospital wait times](#), [Opioid prescription rates](#), [Employee settlements](#), [accountability actions](#) and [Chief executive travel](#).

“Now that the VA has made a commitment to reporting accurate quality and comparative data on its nursing homes, we are pleased to begin adding that important information to our transparency portfolio for the benefit of veterans in making their health care choices,” said Acting VA Secretary Peter O'Rourke. “Further, we will release this data annually and use it to drive improvements across the VA nursing home system, including aggressive efforts to improve our 11 one-star facilities by sharing best practices,” he said.

The best comparison of VA nursing homes to the private sector is in the overall star rating. Using that overarching and most important metric, the VA's performance compares very closely with that of the private sector. See [here](#) for a comparison of quality ratings using CMS' [Nursing Home Compare](#) Five Star Quality Rating System as of April 2018.

Of note, VA nursing homes often serve residents with more numerous and challenging medical conditions than do private sector facilities. Specifically, VA nursing homes serve a much higher proportion of residents with conditions such as prostate obstruction, spinal cord injury, mental illness, homelessness, PTSD, combat injury, terminal illness, and other conditions rarely seen in private nursing homes.

Also, private sector nursing homes admit patients selectively, whereas – unlike the private sector – VA will not refuse service to any eligible Veteran, no matter how challenging the Veteran's conditions are to treat. In other words, VA nursing homes often house residents with more complex medical needs that private sector facilities will not accept, which makes achieving good quality ratings more challenging.

As a result, VA nursing homes at times rate lower than private sector facilities on specific metrics such as pain and type of treatment. Despite that fact, VA nursing homes compare well with private sector facilities in overall facility rankings. Additionally, VA nursing homes have a higher staff-to-resident ratio than private sector facilities, meaning residents in VA facilities get more direct attention from nursing home staff than do residents in the private sector.



# CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT SPINK COUNTY



The Spink County Commission has hired Steven Wollman to serve as their County Veterans Service Officer. Wollman replaces Gordon Richard who retired this week.

Gordon not only served as the county VSO but also held many leadership positions in the S.D. Veterans Service Officers Association. We wish Gordon the best in his retirement.

Steve will use the same email address and will be in the office Tuesday—Thursdays from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm.



# SD AMERICAN LEGION STATE CONVENTION



Dennis Brenden of Watertown, was elected as the State Commander of The American Legion Department of South Dakota by delegates attending the 100th Annual State Convention of The American Legion in Spearfish. Brenden's homecoming will be held August 4, at Post 17 in Watertown.



State Auxiliary President Jeannine Loesch has announced her homecoming will be June 23, at the Pat Duffy Community & Youth Involved Center in Ft. Pierre.

Verle Whipple, member of Post 109 of Gary, was re-elected as Department Sergeant-At-Arms for a one-year term. State Vice Commanders elected out of their Area Caucuses were Ed Thompson of Custer Post 46 for Districts 1 & 2 and Ed Stringer of Sioux Falls Post 15 for Districts 3-8.



SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman addressed the membership at the general session on Saturday morning. His message included an update on outreach, East River State Veterans Cemetery, and the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Hats off to Hugh Holmes for his outstanding year as Commander!



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls  
 Jun 23—Homecoming for SD American Legion Aux. President Jeannine Loesch—Fort Pierre  
 Jun 27—Black Hills Veterans Job Fair—Western Dakota Tech (800 Mickelson Dr.) Rapid City 11:00 am—4:00 pm (MT)  
 Jul 4—Independence Day (state offices closed)  
 Jul 7—Veterans for Veterans Annual Poker Run—Mitchell Depot—1:00 pm (CT)  
 Jul 11—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
 Jul 12—Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Cemetery Grand Opening—Sisseton—11:00 am (CT)  
 Jul 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Education Classroom—Fort Meade—10:00 am (MT)  
 Jul 14—VVA SD State Council Third Quarter Meeting—Pierre Post 8 American Legion—11:00 am (CT)  
 Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV  
 Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO  
 Jul 26—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre 11:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)  
 Aug 4—Homecoming for SD American Legion Commander Denny Brenden—Watertown  
 Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre  
 Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN  
 Sept 3—Labor Day (state offices closed)  
 Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
 Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)  
 Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs—10:00 am (MT)



## NOTICE

SDDVA has received word that the VA Telehealth Education truck event scheduled for Sioux Falls at the medical center on June 25<sup>th</sup> has been cancelled.

However, on June 27<sup>th</sup> and July 13<sup>th</sup>, the VA's Connected Health Technicians will be holding a Telehealth technology education class for veterans at the Sioux Falls VA. Veterans can bring in their own device (smart phone, tablet, or laptop) and staff will assist them in getting set up for all things Connected Care and Telehealth! These classes will be in Building 5, Room 2009 from 10:30 am -1:00 pm.

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